Co-facilitation

Have you ever felt you had a really good idea? Remember the excitement? Remember the pins and needles you waited on to test the idea? Then reality rears its ugly head and reminds us who is in charge.

That happened to me when I pitched the idea of co-facilitation to my manager. It’s a concept that I believe in and wanted to give it a go. I got the green light and started to plan. I had three interested trainers (which included me).

Failing to plan is planning to fail. (Forgive the cliché.) The good news is that we had a plan. The class is a three week class, so each of us took one week. But it still took planning time because we had to make some adjustments to the agenda to accommodate where the trainer felt were strengths and areas of opportunity. We even had a color coded Excel spreadsheet that mapped out the entire three weeks! We thought that keeping one trainer in the class for each week was the simplest idea. (The simplest way may not be the best way. Have you ever accepted the lowest bid on a repair or refurbishment and were later disappointed?) We’ll count this as mistake number one and will be discussed soon.

I was the lucky one because I got to go first. This is a crucial time because it’s when relationships are established. The other two trainers introduced themselves and said good-bye until it was their turn in the rotation. Oops, that was mistake number two. Although my experience with the class was uneventful and encouraging, we did not prepare properly for the transition. The other trainers should have been more visible during week one, even if only to hang out a little and communicate with the class. By not doing this, it essentially meant that a stranger would be taking over for weeks two and three.

Week two was also mostly uneventful with the exception of a stranger is now the trainer. Remember mistake one? We should have planned in more detail where each of us facilitated sections within each week. This would remedy the “stranger” in the classroom phenomenon. We had identified our areas of strengths and opportunities, so we had already done the hard part of identifying who will train what. And we should have divvied up the more difficult sections better too. I’ve lost count on the mistakes, but that was the next one.

By week three another stranger entered the room, claiming to be the trainer. This was the most inexperienced trainer of the three and training some of the most difficult material. (Think of the importance of a closer in baseball game.) Although initial planning was done and none of us objected, the two more experienced trainers should have recognized this and suggested to swap weeks. The most likely scenario would have been swap weeks two and three. By now everything was falling apart, and it was very disappointing. It felt like an epic failure.

Good news is that it was a learning experience. I still believe in co-facilitation and recently completed a co-facilitated class that was very successful. The class earned the highest quality scores in the last six months and has set the benchmark for 2013. I’m very proud of them.